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AGRICULTURE--IMPORTANT TO THE NATION

I'm very pleased to be here with you on this fine Texas morning. This new Center you're dedicating today represents two areas of great interest and concern to me in my past associations and present position. I've worked as a research professor and extension program leader at a land-grant university, and now both extension and research activities for the Federal government are part of my responsibility in the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

I was glad to hear Texas Farm Bureau President Chaloupka talk about the importance of Texas agriculture. Part of the success story of agriculture here in Texas. . .and elsewhere in our great nation. . .is tied to the contributions of research and extension. It is much easier to see the impact of these two on agriculture at this local level -- in the fields, factories, and stores and homes of Texas -- than it is at the national level. . .because this is where the extension and research action is.

Our nation has a diverse agriculture -- diverse because of each area's unique combinations of soil, water, fertility, climate, markets and other factors. Ours is not one agriculture. Even within a state -- and certainly within a great state such as Texas -- there is wide diversity.

In that diversity lies much of the strength of our agriculture. And from that strength comes an important part of the strength of our country.

What's the contribution that our agriculture is making nationally? It is significant.

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Remarks of M. Rupert Cutler, Assistant Secretary for Conservation, Research, and Education, U.S. Department of Agriculture, at dedication ceremonies for the new Texas A&M University Agricultural Research and Extension Center at Amarillo, September 24, 1977.

Let me cite some figures:

1. Agriculture is our nation's biggest industry. It has assets of over \$531 billion. That's about three-fifths of the total capital assets of all manufacturing corporations in the country.
2. The food industry is the nation's biggest employer. Between 14 and 17 million people work in some phase of the food industry, from growing food and fiber to selling it at the supermarket.
3. Last year, Americans spent more than 154 billion dollars on U.S. farm-produced foods.
4. Farmers pay \$2.9 billion in farm real estate taxes, \$427 million in personal property taxes, \$4.3 billion in Federal and state income taxes, and about \$500 million in sales taxes.

Internationally, the importance of agriculture is clear. First, our agricultural exports have been a major factor in our balance of trade. Without those exports, we would be in much worse shape than we are.

Too, there is the need for food abroad. The Food and Agriculture Organization reports that even after a generation of developmental assistance, most nations are chronic importers of food. And the situation has gotten worse. While 45 nations either exported food or were self-sufficient in 1950, only 19 nations did so in 1974, with 4 countries -- including the U.S. -- accounting for over 90 percent of the exports.

And so it goes. No need to cite more of these kinds of figures to you. You understand their implications.

There are other signs of the importance of agriculture. The media today pay close attention to drought, to floods, to pest infestations, other conditions that affect agriculture, and therefore -- eventually -- the consumer. Congress has just completed a far-reaching debate as it finalized the Farm Bill of 1977 that will affect farmers and consumers for some time to come. International experts talk of the need for food around the world, and food is discussed as an international tool for negotiation.

Environmentally, we're very concerned about how to maintain our long-range agricultural productivity and still preserve the quality of the environment around us. Clean water. . .clean air. . .as little pollution of all kinds as possible. . .as much dependence on biological control of pests as possible, and on biological sources of fertility: these are some of our environmental objectives.

Thus agriculture has a much higher profile today than it has had for many years. This is the climate in which we have to do our basic jobs -- to see that the needed food and fiber is there for us when we need it, while protecting the quality of human life in rural America.

Extension and agricultural research in the States and the U.S. Department of Agriculture are both dedicated to getting those jobs done.

It is this Federal-State partnership in these two areas that is the envy of the world.

I spoke earlier of the diversity of our agriculture. Research and extension have been successful in helping agriculture for the very same reason -- they both have been diversified and dispersed across the country. And yet are able to marshall their resources to attack major national problems.

They go where the problems are.

Our forefathers didn't try to develop a single great central research and extension structure at the federal level to do the job. They knew that wouldn't work. Instead, they set up a cooperative Federal-State system. Their wisdom in doing so is amply demonstrated by the way this system works today.

Extension agents and experiment station researchers are located where the people are. . .where the agriculture is. . .where the problems are. The problems this new High Plains Center will deal with are different from those to be encountered down along the Gulf. And so the research and extension programs for these two areas also will differ.

But the research and extension systems and programs are not local alone . . .because problems needing solution are not local alone. They are also statewide, regional, and national.

Our Federal-State partnership gives us the needed research and extension strength and capabilities to deal with problems at all these levels. Our USDA research units specialize in national and regional problems -- and sometimes international problems. The State agricultural experiment stations and extension services concentrate on the needs locally, statewide, and regionally.

Does this system pay off? There's no question that it does. Federal funding of State and Federal research is increasing. State financing of state research is increasing at an even greater rate.

Congress and state legislatures are voting increased funds because they are convinced -- as the people they represent are convinced -- that research pays off. How much?

Well, there is evidence that research returns at least 30 to 40 percent on investment, and frequently far more, as in the case of hybrid corn varieties. Compare that with the 15 percent return that industry generally feels it needs to invest in something profitably. So I am convinced that the citizens of Texas have made a wise decision in investing in this new Center. It will pay off many times over for all of us.

I'm also most encouraged by some things happening at the national level to strengthen certain important aspects of research.

First, Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland is insistent that we do everything possible to improve our predicting of weather and climate. He knows from personal experience on his Minnesota farm just how much the farmer is at the mercy of weather and climate. We're going to make significant new efforts in this area, in cooperation with NASA and the National Weather Service.

Second, Congress has authorized us to expand our agricultural research more extensively into the basic research area. There is considerable applied research in agriculture. And there is firm support for the basic sciences through organizations such as the National Science Foundation. But between these two extremes, we are badly in need of basic research related directly to agriculture and human nutrition.

That is where this new program will be aimed. We are calling it a "mission-oriented basic research program" to distinguish it from basic research which is undertaken strictly to gain new knowledge for the sake of knowing only. The research under this program will gain some badly needed new knowledge. But it will be knowledge that we believe is vital if we are to make advances in applied agricultural sciences.

Competitive grants will be made for research in two areas vital to Americans and the world:

1. Research related to food production; and
2. Human nutrition research.

I can't think of two more basic and important areas -- first, making sure we have the food we need; and second, making sure that our people are getting the proper nutrition to help them lead healthy and happy lives.

Centers such as the one we are dedicating today provide an excellent base for the services research and extension perform for our country. Looking ahead, it is clear that these services are vital, are a good investment, and carry much promise for all of us in the future.

I congratulate you on this fine facility and all it stands for. It represents a model facility and a model program for the Nation.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in your ceremony.

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